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United States Department of State
September 13, 1988
EXCISE

10005

~~TOP SECRET~~
INFORMATION INVICI/ORDM
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TO: The Secretary
FROM: INR - Morton I. Abramowitz
SUBJECT: Iraq: Status Report on the Kurdish Situation

- Saddam is determined to resolve the Kurdish problem, and probably will continue military operations aimed at stamping out pockets of Kurdish resistance regardless of the criticism from abroad.
- The military phase of Iraq's campaign against Kurdish dissidents in the northern portion of Iraqi Kurdistan appears to be winding down; military operations seem to be shifting to areas in southeastern Iraqi Kurdistan (see map). No further hard evidence of chemical weapons (CW) use has emerged since late August.
- Large numbers of Kurds have been displaced by recent military operations and the destruction of Kurdish villages. Up to 100,000 have sought refuge in Turkey and Iran, the overwhelming majority in Turkey. Only a small number of them appear to be taking advantage of the Iraqi government amnesty.

Baghdad's escalating anti-Kurdish campaign. Saddam's determination to deal decisively with the problem of the Kurdish insurgency in northern Iraq is largely driven by the fact that the Kurds seized upon the war as an opportunity to intensify their guerrilla operations against the Iraqi government, with Iranian assistance. Masud Barzani's Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) remained implacable in its opposition to the Iraqi government throughout the war. Jalal al-Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), on the other hand, attempted in 1983 to arrive at a modus vivendi with Baghdad, but the negotiations collapsed in early 1984.

Iraqi efforts against the Kurds escalated in the wake of the resumption of hostilities between Baghdad and the PUK. The Iraqis organized in the mid-1980's large numbers of lightly armed Kurdish militia units drawn from the many Kurdish tribes loyal to Baghdad for use against the PUK and KDP. During the

1984-85 period, the Iraqis first began razing dissident Kurdish villages, often first employing artillery and aircraft and later completing the job with bulldozers.

As the war against Iran turned more in Iraq's favor in 1987, the Iraqi government initiated its current campaign to resettle dissident Kurds in flat lands remote from their traditional mountain strongholds. In the wake of the August 1988 cease-fire, Baghdad was in a position to bring larger and more powerful forces into action against the Kurds, and the tide turned decisively against them.

The current situation on the ground. Iraqi operations against elements of the KDP located in northern Kurdistan had slowed considerably by September 9, [redacted] Operations against the Kurds in the V Corps sector in the north reached their peak in late August and have now largely ceased.

Action appears to be shifting southeast into areas garrisoned by the Iraqi I Corps, perhaps a second phase of the campaign that began in August.

Pro-Baghdad Kurdish militia units have carried out most of the actual ground combat and patrolling activity against Kurdish dissidents. Artillery, armor and air support have been provided by regular Iraqi government forces. Regular Iraqi infantry often conduct sweeps in support of pro-government militia elements up major valleys or along main roads.

Relocation inside Iraq. Many Kurds who inhabited the mountain villages of northern Iraqi Kurdistan and supported the rebel forces have been relocated by the Iraqi government to large camps near major towns in Kurdistan, or to the south and southwest near the Saudi border. A major relocation program began in the summer of 1987, and we estimate that as many as 100,000 may have been relocated since then.

Use of chemical weapons. Interviews with refugees suggest the most recent chemical weapons (CW) use against Kurdish guerrillas and villagers occurred in late August. Burns and blisters which could have been caused by Iraqi CW attacks are in evidence on many refugees.

Kurdish casualties. No reliable casualty figures are available. Kurdish claims that Iraq has killed 20-30,000 Kurds in the recent fighting probably are exaggerated.

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